

# STARTING OUT WITH HENS

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## Starting with hens

So you have decided to start keeping chickens, or you are looking into it? Well you are in for a treat, hens provide a wealth of entertainment and it can be all too easy to become really attached to them all. This guide is written for you in mind with a few brief hints to get you started

### Introduction to a new home

It is a good idea to keep new birds shut in for 2-3 days.

If placing new birds to an existing flock, introduce the new birds to the others in the shed when it is dark.

To minimise disease spread isolating new birds for a couple of weeks can ensure you are not introducing any new infections to your flock

Place an extra drinker and feeder in the house until they have all settled down.

Most birds will start to lay 3-4 weeks after they have settled into their new home.

### Feed

- It is ideal to have a feeder which is suspended in the house preferable so the bottom is level with the top of the chicken's back.
- For laying birds layers pellets or mash is best.
- A little wheat can be given in the afternoon if you like but avoid feeding mixed corn as this can make them over fat.
- Mixed grit should be available at all times to help digestion.
- Avoid lawn clippings as it can cause crop impactions.
- Scraps can be given but it is important they do not contain salt.

### Housing

Your birds will be happy in a good foxproof airy shed preferably with a window to provide light however a covered dark nest box is also important.

Wheat straw or wood shavings are the best litter for both the nestbox and the house itself. It is often a good idea each time the shed is cleaned that a mite/lice powder is spread on the floor.



### Health

**Droppings** - Loose droppings are normal when coming into lay. Worming needs to be done at least twice a year, but more frequently is advised foraging space is limited.

**Mites & lice** - must be controlled through spraying the shed regularly or scattering with lice powder.

**Moulting** occurs when laying birds become tired. They will stop laying and will loose feathers but most will re-grow within 1-2months. During this time it is important to feed the best quality food so that they recover and will continue to lay during the next period of lay. The moulting period lasts 10-12weeks.

**"Going broody"** - is when chickens stop laying and sit on their nest the whole time. If there is one broody this will encourage others in the shed to do the same. Frequent egg collection prevents this. Otherwise to stop a broody bird, place her in a small box with a wire or slatted floor e.g. wire cat cage. Give her feed and water for 5 days and then return her to the flock.

**Diarrhoea** - can be caused due to a sudden change in food, a gut infection due to mixing older birds or eating something bacterially infected.

**If you are concerned about a health issue feel free to 'Ask the Vet' or contact your local veterinary surgeon**